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ABSTRACT

One common laboratory manipulation in interpersonal attraction has been the exchange of reinforcements in the form of similar or dissimilar attitude statements. The first impression should influence not only attraction responses and subsequent behavior, but also should influence the perception of subsequent information received in the course of an interaction. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the sequential perception of information received. The factors of expectancy, sequential presentation and context effects were involved in this study. Ninety college students exchanged attitude viewpoints verbally after first receiving written similarity information. Significant effects for attraction and perception of attitudes were found for verbal interaction but not for the prior attitude information. The discussion notes this unexpected result, and several suggestions are offered to explain these results. Limited evidence is seen for the presence of perceptual distortion in this study. (Author)

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# INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION AND THE PERCEPTION OF ATTITUDINAL FEEDBACK

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Let us suppose that you hear a report of attitudes expressed by another psychologist, whom you have never met, which disagree with your own. Then, at a meeting such as M. P. A., you meet this same person, and he expresses to you attitudes on some other issues with which you agree. You had your initial impression of him, and now have received additional information about him via the second set of attitudes. How would your attraction toward him be affected by the two sets of attitudes? What is the effect of earlier disagreement (or agreement) on your perception of the attitudinal positions expressed by him in a face-to-face situation?

This was the line of questioning which prompted the research to be reported here. There were two factors which provided the impetus and rationale for this investigation. One was the question of individual differences, and the other was the question of what relationships hold beyond the first impression stage.

Individual differences by and large have been insignificant in the attraction research of the Byrne paradigm. There is one point, however, which still provides interest: the large variability in the attraction response to the dissimilar stranger. Fish (1971) in his dissertation

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research, studied this aspect in terms of the accuracy of interpersonal perception. After seeing the attitude responses of an anonymous stranger, the subjects were asked to reproduce the stranger's responses on a blank attitude survey form. He found that those who expressed high attraction for the dissimilar stranger were misperceiving the attitude-similarity feedback in the direction of greater similarity. Is this misperception a consistent phenomenon and does it affect the attraction response?

In regard to the second question, Byrne (1971) has noted that one limitation of the laboratory study of attraction is its limited time span, and that it has been essentially a study of first impressions. One direction for attraction research to develop, then, would be to study what relationships hold beyond the first-impression by studying the effect of previous attitudinal agreement or disagreement on the perception of attitude similarity information received later in a face-to-face situation. There are three issues relevant to this problem.

The concept of expectancy becomes involved, especially, when one person receives information about another person, and is then told he will receive later information. The cognitive approaches to interpersonal attraction use this concept of expectancy in terms of future reinforcements in the form of social approval or increase-decrease of self-esteem (Aronson & Linder, 1965; Aronson & Worchel,

1966; Nelson, 1966). The reinforcement model (Byrne, 1971; Byrne & Clore, 1970) depends on attitudes being inherently reinforcing and eliciting an implicit affective response. The attraction response is thus a function of the weighted proportion of positive reinforcements, be they attitudes or personal evaluations, etc. Griffitt (1968, 1969), however, working from the reinforcement point of view, has found evidence for anticipatory responses to future reinforcements.

Another important consideration has been the role of sequential presentation of attitudes. Byrne, et al. (1969) have shown some of the factors involved in this issue. In presenting a series of attitudinal stimuli, it was found that a final mode of responding produced a primacy effect, but a continuous mode of responding produced a strong recency effect. This was true even when there was covert continuous responding. The authors suggested that face-to-face situations would probably involve continuous covert responding and, thus, a recency effect.

The third issue was closely related to this. Since, as Griffitt noted (1971), there is a definite context in which the attitudinal stimuli are presented, this context must be considered for its influence on the attraction response. Griffitt dealt primarily with the use of multiple stimulus persons presenting both agreement and disagreement, but the context is relevant to the single stimulus person as well. Two types of context effects

noted: assimilation and contrast. Each effect accounts for a different outcome in the attraction response.

The study reported here was planned to involve these issues. Subjects were given attitude feedback information and then met the stranger face-to-face to exchange other attitudes. The factors of expectancy, sequential presentation, and context effects were involved.

Procedure

The research was conducted in two stages. Ninety college students who were pretested on a 50-item attitude survey were divided into three groups of thirty each, and given written feedback about the attitudes of another subject on twelve issues selected from the scale. Subjects received either 100%, 50% or 0% similarity feedback. Following this manipulation the same subject pairs were allowed to interact with each other, the task being to exchange viewpoints about 12 different topics selected from the original 50. In this phase each of the three groups was further subdivided such that the items for discussion were those on which they actually agreed either 100%, 50% or 0% of the time. The design was a 3x3 factorial ANOVA with ten subjects per cell. One dimension was first impression attitude feedback, and the other dimension was actual agreement percentage communicated face-to-face. Dependent measures were the amount of attraction, measured by the Interpersonal Judgment Scale, and the proportion of item agreement attrabuted by the subject to his partner.

## Results

The verbal exchange of viewpoints in stage II significantly influenced attraction ($F=7.1995$, df 2/81, $p$ .002), perceived number of similar attitudes ($F=134,69$, df 2/81, $p$ .001), the number of steps the attitude position was moved toward self ($F=35.802$, df 2/81, $p$ .001), and the number of steps the attitude position was moved away from self ($F=19.823$, df 2/81, $p$ .001). These later two categories were used as measures of misperception of actual attitude endorsement between partners (Fish, 1971). No main effects were found for the initial feedback condition ($F$ 1), nor were there any interaction effects ($F$ 1). Tables 1 and 2 report the means for the attraction scores and the perceived number of similar attitudes.

Noting that the standard deviations were higher for the .00 similarity column of the verbal exchange condition (Table 1), the Hartley $F_{max}$ test (Winer, 1971) was used to test for homogeneity of variance. It was found that the variance for this data was heterogeneous ($F_{max}=4.61$, df 3/29, $p$ .01). Trend analysis using orthogonal comparisons (Winer, 1971) showed a significant linear trend ($F=17.52$, df 2/87, $p$ .01).

## Discussion

It was a surprise that the attitude similarity feedback of stage I failed to influence attraction. There was some evidence for a contrast effect with the violation of expectancy, but this was limited (compare the

means of Table 1). This occurred clearly when the level of similarity changed from high (1.00) to low (o.00). These results support the position of Jones and Wein (1972) who maintain that a change from dissimilar to similar attitudes produces higher attraction than a change from similar to dissimilar attitudes.

On the other hand, in the low similarity condition of the stage II manipulation, the number of similar attitudes attributed to the partner (see Table 2) clearly did not correspond to the attraction response, did not correspond to the final proportion of similarity, and was clearly in the direction of greater similarity. It should also be noted that when the stimulus was evenly divided between similar and dissimilar attitudes, there was again a distortion toward similarity. Although there was a misperception in the 1.00 similarity level, its magnitude was not as great. In any event, there is clear evidence in this study of a selective perceptual distortion of attitudinal feedback received during actual interaction.

The lack of effect due to the attitudinal feedback on attraction may be explained in several ways. (1) The responses given verbally may not have been as clear and precise as those marked on a survey, and those giving the responses may have shifted their emphasis some. (2) There may have been an overriding influence in actually meeting the stranger face-to-face. The variety of cues for attraction which were available may have had

more effect than the experimental variables. (3) There may have been some aspect of the instructions which influenced the results. (4) The personality of the experimenter may have been a factor in the results. (5) The difference between the feedback and verbal exchange conditions was striking, and this may account for the greater effect of the later. Whatever explanation seems most helpful, this area seems worthy of further study.

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TABLE 1

Mean Scores on the
Interpersonal Judgment Scale

Interaction Condition

| Feedback Condition | .00 | | .50 | | 1.00 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\bar{X}$ | S.D. | $\bar{X}$ | S.D. | $\bar{X}$ | S.D. | Total |
| 1.00 | 9.9 | (1.89) | 12.6 | (1.73) | 12.8 | (1.62) | 11.767 |
| .50 | 10.7 | (3.68) | 11.9 | (1.73) | 12.7 | (1.06) | 11.767 |
| .00 | 11.4 | (2.81) | 12.1 | (1.26) | 12.2 | (1.32) | 11.90 |
| Total | 10.67 | | 12.20 | | 12.57 | | |

TABLE 2

Mean Number of Similar Attitudes
Attributed to Partner

Interaction Condition

| Feedback Condition | .00 | .50 | 1.00 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.00 | 3.6 | 7.5 | 10.5 | 7.20 |
| .50 | 2.9 | 7.7 | 10.0 | 7.533 |
| .00 | 3.5 | 7.4 | 10.1 | 7.00 |
| Total | 3.333 | 7.5333 | 10.200 | |

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